



ON “MEMORIAL DAY #7” AND “UP 65” BY JEREMY ERIC TENENBAUM

There are very few American photographers of note who haven’t attempted to bring urban American landscapes to life. Jeremy was certainly no exception. “Memorial Day #7” and “Up 65” are both bravura and very successful stabs in this direction. It’s interesting to me how the painter’s eye for coloration differs from the photographers’— how Abby, for example, invents where Jeremy preserves. You could take photography itself as a discipline as a potentially high-minded, Americanized answer to classicist Europe and its illustrious, solidly

built history. Photography in some senses etherealizes what painting solidifies and concretizes. These two cityscape portraits of Jeremy's have a sheen of otherworldliness which chafes against the confines of their subject matter— the represented objects are bequeathed an auratic glow, a halo. Much of this has to do with freakish accidents of coloration— like the sky in "Memorial Day #7." It appears to be such a bold shade of purple, that the way its light comingles with light cast by the streetlights in the picture, it could be a Philip K. Dick vision of a future, post-apocalyptic world, or even a civilization's remnants on a foreign planet which loosely resembles planet Earth.

The pungent (half) realism of this world would be difficult to capture in paint— the ethereality of Abby's "Skaters" comes close. I don't even know precisely where this was shot— my educated guess would be Southwest Philly, perhaps on Bainbridge in the 20s. What's also interesting to me is that the eerie light effect Jeremy captures is (in a contradictory way) delicious and enticing; it makes the receptive viewer want to be there on Bainbridge Street pre-dawn and walk on the extraterrestrial terrain. Most American photographers blow their chances to make American cities interesting by playing the game too straight— Jeremy, of course, was incapable of playing any game too straight. He was too fiercely proud of his queerness to do so. The visual subtext of "Memorial Day #7" is odd delectability and glamour; what "Up 65" does with New Jersey's Tacony-Palmyra Bridge has more to do with a profound sense of ruefulness and "the blues," which make the portrait much less about surfaces and more about depths. We are clued in through visual depths that the picture is being taken from inside a moving vehicle which is about to cross the bridge; and the "double" here has to do with bridges crossed and connections made which nonetheless have gloominess built into them somewhere— perhaps through tragic flaws revealing themselves or irreconcilable differences appearing in insurmountable forms.

The poetry, as they say, is in the pity— how the overwhelming and merciless grey sky dwarfs our little human constructs, whether they be bridges or attempts to represent the same (second bridges derived from the first). Further interest is added by an implicit narrative— since the shot was snapped from inside a moving vehicle, one wonders what the protagonist's relationship to the driver is, and if the metaphoric arrow lands there. Whether or not it does, the narrative gap which opens is wide enough for innumerable answers to fill it. That's the hinge "Up 65" has to the infinite. Since it begins from the American egalitarianism of capturing a vista which was already there to begin with, the classicist bent of PFS is balanced by Jeremy's anti-classicism, which borrows enough depth and multi-dimensionality from standard

and standardized classicism to measure about to world standards. The crossroads site for this conglomeration of sensibilities is Philadelphia and its environs— the secret Paris of the East Coast, bluffing and dodging like the Gemini it is, ready to be seen and revealed by the right eyes at the right time, and passed along to those interested.

Adam Fieled, 2013